

P 102223Z SEP 96
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1492
DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC
INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS
NSC WASHDC
USIA WASHDC 0137
DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
SECDEF WASHDC
DEA WASHDC
NDIC JOHNSTOWN PA
SECDEF WASHDC//OCDEPS//
DIRNSA FT GEORGE G MEADE
FBI WASHDC
DIA WASHDC
CIA WASHDC
DIRONDCP WASHDC
USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS PM
AMEMBASSY PANAMA
AMEMBASSY QUITO
AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BOGOTA 008773

STATE FOR INL, ARA/AND, DRL, L/LEI
NSC FOR JAMES DOBBINS
ONDCP FOR BILL BOZIN
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
DEA FOR OF, OFL, OC, AX
JUSTICE FOR CRIM. WARREN, RICHARD AND NDDS/VAN VLIET
FBI FOR DIV. 6
USIA FOR AR, I/GAR
TREASURY FOR FINCEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/10/01

TAGS: PGOV PTER PREL PHUM PINR CO

SUBJECT: FARC ATTACK IN GUAVIARE KILLS 22 COLOMBIAN SOLDIERS; 60
OTHER SOLDIERS REMAIN IN FARC CAPTIVITY

REF: A) BOGOTA 8540 B) BOGOTA 8616 C) BOGOTA 8737

¶1. CLASSIFIED BY POL/ECONOFF. S.K. ABETYTA. REASON: 1.5(D)

SUMMARY

¶2. (U) A FARC ATTACK IN GUAVIARE DEPARTMENT SEPTEMBER 6 LEFT A REPORTED 22 COLOMBIAN ARMY (COLAR) SOLDIERS DEAD. THE ATTACK INDICATES A DETERMINATION BY THE FARC TO KEEP UP THE OFFENSIVE LAUNCHED AUGUST 30 (REF A). OTHER ATTACKS BY THE FARC AND ELN CONTINUE TO UNSETTLE COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT COLOMBIA. MEANWHILE, THE FARC CONTINUE TO HOLD CAPTIVE SOME 60 SOLDIERS TAKEN IN THE AUGUST 30 ATTACK ON LAS DELICIAS, PUTUMAYO DEPARTMENT, DESPITE FARC ASSURANCES THAT IT WOULD RELEASE THEM TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS (ICRC -- REF A). PRESIDENT SAMPER ANNOUNCED A THREE-POINT PLAN TO INCREASE GOVERNMENT FORCES' READINESS IN THE FACE OF THE INCREASED GUERRILLA ATTACKS LIKELY TO COME. END SUMMARY.

FARC KILLS OVER 20 SOLDIERS IN GUAVIARE

¶3. (U) THE FARC FIRST FRONT KILLED 22 SOLDIERS SEPTEMBER 6 IN LA CARPA, A PEASANT HAMLET TWO HOURS DISTANT BY RIVER LAUNCH FROM SAN JOSE, CAPITAL OF GUAVIARE DEPARTMENT. ACCORDING TO SEPTEMBER 8 NEWSPAPER ACCOUNTS, 300 TO 400 MEMBERS OF THE THE FARC FIRST FRONT UNDER THE COMMAND OF "MONO JOJOY" (KNOWN AS THE JUAN JOSE RONDON MOBILE COLUMN) ENTERED LA CARPA SEPTEMBER 5 AND, WIELDING MACHETES AND KNIVES, INTIMIDATED THE 50 RESIDENTS. AN UNSPECIFIED NUMBER OF PEASANTS RECEIVED MINOR WOUNDS. FIVE KILOMETERS FROM LA CARPA, A COLAR SECOND MOBILE BRIGADE PATROL UNIT CONSISTING OF 40 SOLDIERS HEARD OF THE HARRASSMENT AND INFORMED BRIGADE COMMANDER GENERAL OSPINA, WHO ORDERED THE UNIT TO LA CARPA. IN THE EARLY MORNING HOURS OF FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, THE UNIT ARRIVED AT LA CARPA, WHICH WAS SURROUNDED BY GUERRILLAS LYING IN WAIT. DESPITE THE WARNINGS OF LA CARPA RESIDENTS, THE

SOLDIERS REMAINED. AT 6:00 AM GUERRILLAS OPENED MACHINEGUN FIRE ON THE TOWN, WOUNDING SEVERAL SOLDIERS. THE SOLDIERS ATTEMPTED TO REPEL THE ATTACK WITH RIFLES BUT WERE CLEARLY SURROUNDED. AFTER TWO HOURS OF FIGHTING, GUERRILLAS LAUNCHED FRAGMENTATION GRENADES TO FORCE THE SOLDIERS TO GIVE UP. THE COLAR UNIT COMMANDER REQUESTED AIR AND LAND SUPPORT, BUT NONE ARRIVED. AFTER THE GRENADE ATTACK, THE SURVIVING SOLDIERS SOUGHT REFUGE IN THE JUNGLE, AND THE GUERRILLAS SENT A REPORTED 20 DOBERMAN PINSCHERS INTO THE JUNGLE TO LOCATE THE WOUNDED SOLDIERS. TWO HOURS LATER, ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS, TRANSPORT HELICOPTERS, CARRYING COLAR REINFORCEMENTS, ARRIVED AT THE SCENE. THEY FOUND 19 SOLDIERS DEAD, 10 WOUNDED, 11 SURVIVORS, AND TWO MISSING IN ACTION. BY AUGUST 9 THE NUMBER OF DEAD HAD RISEN TO 22 SOLDIERS. THE DEAD AND WOUNDED WERE TRANSPORTED TO THE AIRPORT IN SAN JOSE, GUAVIARE DEPARTMENT, JUST AS STAFFDEL MACKEY ARRIVED FROM BOGOTA THE MORNING OF SEPTEMBER 7 (REF C).

OTHER ATTACKS THROUGHOUT COLOMBIA

¶4. (U) PRESS ACCOUNTS SEPTEMBER 9 SUMMARIZED OTHER INCIDENTS SEEN AS PART OF THE GUERRILLA OFFENSIVE AS IT CONTINUED OVER THE WEEKEND OF SEPTEMBER 7-8:

- IN LOS REMEDIOS, ANTIOQUIA DEPARTMENT, A CLASH BETWEEN ELN AND GOVERNMENT FORCES SEPTEMBER 8 LEFT TWO SOLDIERS AND ONE GUERRILLA DEAD. TWO CHILDREN WERE WOUNDED.
- IN ARAUCA DEPARTMENT, THE ARMY KILLED TWO ELN GUERRILLAS ATTEMPTING TO PLACE A BOMB ON A BRIDGE OVER THE CARANAL RIVER.
- IN ZULIA, NORTE DE SANTANDER DEPARTMENT, DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE GOC AND CAMPESINOS WAS SUSPENDED. THE ARMY ANNOUNCED ITS INTENTION TO PREVENT 200 PROTESTING CAMPESINOS FROM ENTERING CUCUTA.
- IN NARINO DEPARTMENT, GUERRILLAS EXPLODED A SECTION OF THE TRANSANDEAN OIL PIPELINE NEAR THE MUNICIPALITY OF MALLAMA.
- AUTHORITIES IN NARINO DEPARTMENT SUSPENDED CARGO AND PASSENGER TRAFFIC ON THE ROADS BECAUSE OF GUERRILLA THREATS.
- MEMBERS OF THE ELN'S LUIS CARLOS CARDENAS FRONT ASSAULTED THE POLICE STATION IN THE HAMLET OF MAGDALENA IN VALLE DEL CAUCA DEPARTMENT.
- IN BARRANCABERMEJA, SANTANDER DEPARTMENT, GUERRILLAS DISTRIBUTED FLYERS ANNOUNCING THEIR INTENTION TO PARALYZE ACTIVITY IN THE AREA FOR FIVE DAYS. HOWEVER, ACTIVITY REMAINED NORMAL IN BARRANCABERMEJA AS OF SEPTEMBER 8.
- GUERRILLAS BURNED VEHICLES ON ROADS LEADING TO CUCUTA, NORTE DE SANTANDER, SEVERELY RESTRICTING TRAFFIC.
- IN THE ATLANTIC COASTAL REGION, GUERRILLA ACTIVITIES RESTRICTED TRAFFIC ON NUMEROUS ROADS.
- IN SUCRE DEPARTMENT, THREE CAMPESINOS WERE REPORTEDLY KILLED BY A GROUP OF 30 ARMED PARAMILITARIES.
- IN URABA, THE FIFTH FARC FRONT REPORTEDLY EXECUTED FOUR CAMPESINO LEADERS, CHARGED WITH PROVIDING INFORMATION TO THE ARMY, IN A TOWN NEAR APARTADO.

THE FARC STILL HOLDS 60 SOLDIERS CAPTIVE

¶5. (U) MEANWHILE, THE FARC CONTINUES TO HOLD THE ESTIMATED 60 SOLDIERS CAPTURED IN THE ATTACK ON LAS DELICIAS, PUTUMAYO DEPARTMENT, DESPITE THE FARC'S DECLARATION IT WAS PREPARED TO RELEASE THE SOLDIERS TO THE ICRC (REF A). AN APPEAL BY HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH FOR THE RELEASE OF THE SOLDIERS HAS FAILED TO MOVE

THE FARC LEADERSHIP TO FOLLOW THROUGH WITH ITS STATED COMMITMENT TO THE ICRC. CRITICS CHARGE THAT THE FARC LEADERSHIP IS USING THE HOSTAGE SOLDIERS TO PROTECT ITSELF AND TO GAIN INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION. INTERIOR MINISTER HORACIO SERPA TOLD THE PRESS SEPTEMBER 8 THAT THE FARC ARE TRYING TO USE THE RELEASE OF THE SOLDIERS AS A NEGOTIATING ARGUMENT IN AN INTERNATIONAL DEBATE ON A POSSIBLE DIALOGUE ON PEACE. SERPA INSISTED THAT IF THE GUERRILLA LEADERS ARE COMPLYING WITH NORMS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW AS THEY CLAIM TO BE, THERE IS NOTHING TO NEGOTIATE WITH THE GOC. PIERRE GASSMAN, ICRC DIRECTOR IN BOGOTA, TOLD THE PRESS HE HAD NO IDEA WHAT THE GUERRILLAS HOPED TO ACHIEVE BY HOLDING THE SOLDIERS, BUT SAID THEY CANNOT, UNDER INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW, DEMAND ANYTHING IN EXCHANGE FOR THE SOLDIERS. TO DO SO, SAID GASSMAN, WOULD BE TO COMMIT THE PUNISHABLE CRIME OF EXTORTION BY KIDNAPPING.

SAMPER ANNOUNCES COUNTER-GUERRILLA STRATEGY

¶6. (U) ON SEPTEMBER 8, BOGOTA DAILY "EL TIEMPO" REPORTED PRESIDENT SAMPER HAD ANNOUNCED HIS ADMINISTRATION'S INTENTION TO EMPLOY THREE KEY STRATEGIES TO COUNTER THE RECENTLY ESCALATED GUERRILLA ATTACKS MORE EFFECTIVELY. ACCORDING TO "EL TIEMPO," THE STRATEGIES FOCUS ON INCREASED HUMAN AND ELECTRONIC INTELLIGENCE-GATHERING, INCREASED AIR, LAND AND WATER MOBILITY, AND UPGRADED COMMUNICATIONS CAPABILITIES. SAMPER ALSO CALLED ON THE COLOMBIAN PUBLIC TO SUPPORT CURRENT PROPOSALS IN CONGRESS TO INCREASE THE MILITARY BUDGET AND BROADEN MILITARY JURISDICTIONAL PRIVILEGE -- THE "FUERO MILITAR" (REF B).

COMMENT

¶7. (C) MOST OBSERVERS BELIEVE, AND THE FARC LEADERSHIP HAS PUBLICLY INDICATED, THE GUERRILLA MOVEMENT WILL KEEP UP THE PRESSURE ON THE GOC AND THE COLOMBIAN PUBLIC WITH CONTINUED ATTACKS IN THE WEEKS TO COME. CHARACTERIZING THE ATTACKS AS RETALIATION AGAINST THE GOC FOR ITS COUNTER-NARCOTICS OPERATIONS, ESPECIALLY IN SOUTHERN, COCA-GROWING REGIONS OF COLOMBIA, DEFENSE MINISTER ESGUERRA TOLD THE PRESS THE GUERRILLAS HAVE THE CAPACITY TO CONDUCT CONTINUED "SPECTACULAR" ATTACKS BUT LACK THE POTENTIAL TO OCCUPY MAJOR POPULATION CENTERS OR EXERCISE SIGNIFICANT TERRITORIAL CONTROL. YET THE ESTIMATED 10,000-MEMBER GUERRILLA FORCE BELIEVED TO EXIST AND TO BE GROWING IN COLOMBIA TODAY (COMBINED FARC AND ELN) CLEARLY IS IN A STRONG POSITION TO DISRUPT AND DESTABILIZE COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY, EVEN IF IT IS NOT IN A POSITION TO OVERTHROW THE GOVERNMENT. THE GUERRILLAS' INCREASED NUMBERS HAVE ENABLED THEM TO FORM FIGHTING UNITS OF 200 TO 400 MEN -- LARGE ENOUGH TO OUTNUMBER AND OVERWHELM MANY OF THE COLOMBIAN ARMY UNITS STATIONED IN CONFLICTIVE AREAS. AS ARMY COMMANDER GENERAL BEDOYA POINTED OUT TO ACTING POL/ECON COUNSELOR SEPTEMBER 7, THE GUERRILLAS ENJOY CERTAIN ADVANTAGES IN THE COLOMBIAN COUNTRYSIDE WHICH ENABLE THEM TO EVADE THE COLOMBIAN ARMY, AS THEIR ABILITY TO KEEP 60 HOSTAGE SOLDIERS IN AN UNKNOWN LOCATION AND PREVENTED FROM RESCUE BY GOVERNMENT FORCES ILLUSTRATES.

KNEEBONE

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